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ABSTRACT

In research on equity and justice some investigators have reported that men and women use different allocation norms in distributing rewards; men using an equity rule and women an equality rule, while others conclude that such sex differences in reward allocation appear primarily when the allocator is also a co-recipient of the reward. The present study exposed male and female subjects (129 male, 191 female) to three distributive fairness conditions to examine the role of sex in fairness interactions. Subjects read a story dealing with the grade received by a student in a college course and responded to a questionnaire about the student and his situation. Dependent variables were perceived satisfaction, perceived conflict, trust in teacher, and grade fairness. Main effects for distributive fairness were significant for all dependent variables. No significant main effects for sex were observed. There were significant "sex x distributive fairness" interactions for perceived grade fairness, satisfaction, and trust in teacher. Women responded more positively than men to over reward and more negatively than men to under reward. The "sex x distributive fairness" interactions indicated that distributive fairness treatments do yield sex differences for subjects who are not participants in the allocation situation. (Author/JAC)

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Sex Differences and Distributive Fairness

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Presented at the annual meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association, Chicago, Illinois, May, 1984.

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ABSTRACT

In research on equity and justice some investigators have reported that men and women use different allocation norms in distributing rewards; men using an equity rule and women an equality rule. On the other hand, Major and Deaux (1982), in a careful review of the literature, conclude that such sex differences in reward allocation appear primarily when the allocator is also a co-recipient of the reward. The present study exposed male and female subjects to three distributive fairness conditions to examine the issue of sex x fairness interactions.

Subjects read a story dealing with the grade received by a student in a college course and responded to a questionnaire about the student and his situation. Dependent variables were perceived satisfaction, perceived conflict, trust in teacher, and grade fairness.

Main effects for distributive fairness were significant for all dependent variables. No significant main effects for sex were observed. There were significant sex x distributive fairness interactions for perceived grade fairness, satisfaction, and trust in teacher. Women responded more positively than men to over reward and more negatively than men to under reward.

The sex x distributive fairness interactions indicate that distributive fairness treatments do yield sex differences for subjects who are not participants in the allocation situation. However, these sex differences are related more to level of reward than to equity-inequity. In addition, the results are more congruent with "nurturance" or "interpersonal orientation" interpretations of sex differences than an equity norm versus equality norm interpretation.

In research on equity and justice some investigators have reported that men and women use different allocation norms in distributing rewards (e.g. Kahn, 1972; Lane and Messe, 1971). On the other hand, Major and Deaux (1982), in a careful review of the literature conclude that such sex differences in equity research appear primarily in situations where the allocator is also a co-recipient of the reward. Sex differences have, however, been reported in a variety of other reward allocation contexts. Studies on coalition formation and outcome distribution also report sex differences (e.g., Bond and Vinacke, 1961), in that women and men tend to adopt different strategies.

Research in the area of equity and justice often involves asking subjects to divide a limited amount of a reward among two or more people who have performed some task. The individual subject may or may not be a co-recipient of the reward. Alternatively, subjects may be asked, as observers, about their feelings concerning the rewards made by another allocator in such a situation. Sawyer (1966) found that when the subject was both the allocator and a co-recipient of rewards, sex differences in terms of the preferred distributions did emerge. Sawyer (1966) reports that women were more altruistic and less self-interested in their distribution preferences than were men. Lane and Messe (1971) also found that female allocator/co-recipients were less likely to choose self-interested reward distributions than were males. Lane and Messe reported that "females are both more generous and less conforming than males" in selecting reward distributions (1971, p. 10).

Similar sex differences in rewards, or, more accurately, outcomes, are reported in game and coalition formation research. Wahba (1972) reports

that when coalitions are formed among unequal players, females prefer to divide the outcomes equally while males prefer an equitable division. Larwood and Moely (1979) also report that in a game in which coalitions were formed, men preferred a more equitable distribution of outcomes than did women. In general, in coalition research, "females are less concerned with winning ... and more concerned with arriving at a fair and friendly solution" than are males (Vinacke 1959, p. 357). In playing these games men tend to use a competitive, exploitative strategy in an attempt to win, while women tend to adopt an accomodative strategy (Bond and Vinacke, 1961). Similarly, Uesugi and Vinacke (1963) found that men adopt a competitive strategy in an attempt to maximize personal gains. Women, however, view the game "as a problem of arranging a 'fair' outcome ... satisfactory to all players, rather than as a matter of winning or losing" (Uesug and Vinacke, 1963, p. 78).

The present study differs from much of the equity research and the game-coalition formation research, in that subjects were observers of a grade allocation situation. As observers, subjects were asked about their own perceptions and feelings regarding the grade another student received and the situation in which he received it, and what the feelings of the other student might be. Although the research paradigm differs from the equity and coalition formation research, reward distributions and the fairness of those distributions are central to the study.

METHOD

Subjects

The subjects were 129 male and 191 female students in undergraduate psychology classes.

Procedure

The students were tested in classroom groups of 25 to 40 . A procedure similar to that utilized by Tyler and Caine (1981) was employed. As part of a larger experiment, each subject was randomly assigned to one of three levels of distributive fairness: Over Reward (more than deserved), Just Reward (equity), or Under Reward (less than deserved). The subjects read a story dealing with the grade received by a male student in a college psychology course. The subjects then responded to a questionnaire about the student and his situation. The independent variables were sex of subject and distributive fairness treatment. The dependent variables were scale scores for perceived satisfaction, perceived conflict, trust in teacher, and grade fairness. Scale scores were calculated by summing each subject's scores for each item on the scale. These scores were the responses subjects selected on seven point Likert-type items. Each scale consisted of two items, except perceived conflict which consisted of three items.

RESULTS

Scale scores were analyzed using a two (sex) x three (reward level) factorial design analysis of variance. The results are presented in Table 1. Main effects for distributive fairness were significant for all scale scores. Trust in teacher and grade fairness ratings were highest in the Just Reward (Equity) condition and lowest in the Under Reward condition. Perceived satisfaction was highest in the Over Reward condition and lowest in the Under Reward condition.

The main focus of this study, however, was on sex differences, and the distributive fairness main effects will not be further discussed here. No significant main effects for sex were observed. There were significant or near-significant sex x distributive fairness interactions for perceived grade

fairness, satisfaction, and trust in teacher. Figure 1 illustrates the interaction results. On these three scales women responded more negatively than men to under reward of another and more positively than men to over reward of another.

Discussion

The sex x distributive fairness interactions indicate that distributive fairness treatments can yield sex differences for subjects who are not participants in the allocation situation. However, these sex differences appear to be related more to level of reward than to equity-inequity. The results are more congruent with "nurturance" (e.g., Lubinski, Tellegen, and Butcher, 1983) or "interpersonal orientation" (Swap and Rubin, 1983) interpretations of sex differences than an equity norm (males) versus equality norm (females) interpretation.

Women perceived under reward to be less fair than did men, and over reward to be fairer than did men. Women also perceived the under rewarded student to be less satisfied and the under rewarding teacher to be less trustworthy than did men. On the other hand, women perceived the over rewarded student to be more satisfied and the over rewarding teacher to be more trustworthy than did men. This is consistent with Sawyer's view (1966) that women tend to be more altruistic than men in regard to both salary and grade distribution situations. Other experimental evidence suggests that performance levels are far less important to women than to men in making reward distributions (Blumstein and Weinstein, 1969). Similarly, Stake reports that when subjects are asked to reward others in such a way as to encourage productivity, men make "a greater distinction between more and less capable workers" than do women (1983, p. 415).

The tendency of women to prefer over reward may best be examined in terms of sex differences research outside the arena of justice research. Lubinski, et al. state that femininity is most closely related to variables which "can be labeled as 'nurturance-warmth'" (1983, p. 435). The feminine style, they state, is nurturant and accommodating, while the masculine style is dominant and assimilative. Spence (1983) also believes that the label "nurturant" is descriptive of the style measured by femininity scales. Chaney and Vinacke state that nurturance "is defined as a need to nourish, aid or protect the helpless ... and to be associated with traits of generosity, sympathy, and tolerance toward others" (1960, p. 176). Hence, women might be expected to be more distressed than men by inequitable under reward of others and to respond more favorably than men to inequitable over reward.

Another concept helpful in examining responses to over and under reward is that of interpersonal orientation. Kahn, Nelson, and Gaeddert point out that there is "ample evidence that differences in interpersonal orientation ... are correlated with differences in sex" (1980, p. 745). In examining sex as a determinant of reward allocation in problem-solving triads, they suggest that observed sex differences in allocations may be related to differences in interpersonal orientation.

Swap and Rubin (1983) report that women score significantly higher than do men on the Interpersonal Orientation (IO) Scale, which measures responsiveness to others. Swap and Rubin state that the sex differences observed by many researchers in reward distributions and responses to them "clearly lend themselves to an IO interpretation" (1983, p. 215). The low IO subject, who is typically male, is "more sensitive to quality of performance, rewards, and costs, and less sensitive to other people" (Swap and Rubin, 1983, p. 215). Such subjects, according to Swap and Rubin, are more likely

to use an equity norm in distributing rewards. On the other hand, the high IO subject, who is typically female, "will be more likely to place the other person in the equation, to consider less tangible inputs, to try to understand inferior performance, and to compensate for it" (Swap and Rubin, 1983, p. 215). Major and Adams (1983), in a study of reward distributions made by subjects, also found that women scored significantly higher on the IO scale than men. Their results suggest that "high-IO individuals are genuinely concerned about their co-worker's feelings, whereas low-IO individuals are more concerned about projecting the image that they are concerned about their co-worker's feelings" (Major and Adams, 1983, p. 605). Major and Adams also report that "women and high-IO individuals indicated that their allocations were more motivated by concerns for their co-worker" and that they were more desirous of a positive evaluation by their co-worker than were low-IO subjects and males (1983, p. 606). Hence, women might express greater concern for others and less interest in performance level by responding more positively than men to over reward of others and more negatively than men to under reward of others.

In summary, the results presented in this study suggest that sex differences in response to reward distributions may not necessarily be the result of sex differences in preferred allocation norms (e.g., Equity versus Equality). Rather, the observed differences may be rooted in differences in attitudes and/or personality. The precise origin of such differences is beyond the scope of the present work. However,the findings of the present study suggest that when an inequitable reward is made to another, men and women observers focus on different concerns, with the result that women respond more positively than men to over reward and more negatively than men to under reward.

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Table 1

Analysis of Variance Results

Dependent Variable	Source of Variance	F	p
Trust in Teacher	Distributive Fairness	29.67	.00
	Sex	.83	.36
	Distributive Fairness x Sex	2.41	.09
Grade Fairness	Distributive Fairness	37.87	.00
	Sex	.85	.36
	Distributive Fairness x Sex	4.79	.01
Perceived Conflict	Distributive Fairness	4.05	.02
	Sex	.54	.46
	Distributive Fairness x Sex	.07	.94
Satisfaction	Distributive Fairness	50.34	.00
	Sex	.03	.86
	Distributive Fairness x Sex	2.43	.09

Figure 1. Sex x Distributive Fairness Interactions